

The University of Chicago

NATION IN ARMS AND BALANCE
OF POWER

THE INTERACTION OF GERMAN MILITARY
LEGISLATION AND EUROPEAN
POLITICS, 1866-1914

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1934

By

ARPAD FRANCIS KOVACS

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On May 3, 1866, shortly before the outbreak of the Austro-Prussian war, the historian Adolphe Thiers said in the French chamber of deputies:

I beg the Germans to consider that the greatest principle of European politics is that Germany should be composed of independent states connected among themselves by a simple federative tie. This was the principle proclaimed by the whole of Europe at the congress of Westphalia; this was the principle adopted when the great Frederick on the occasion of the settlement of the question of the Bavarian succession signed the peace of Teschen.....What guarantee was given to France in 1814 when, after having signed the treaty of Paris, she went to Vienna? I have its terms and here is the foremost of these guaranties: 'Germany will be composed of independent states united by a federative tie.' The great European principle that Germany should be composed of independent states was therefore renewed.....

It is certain that if the war is successful for Prussia she will take possession of some of the North German states; those of which she cannot take possession she will unite in a diet under her influence. (Numerous voices: 'That is it! That is it!')

You have the right to oppose this in the name of the interests of France, because France is too important in the world not to be gravely threatened by such a revolution. After she has struggled for two centuries since the great battle of Marignano in 1515 until those of Villaviciosa and d'Almanza in 1707 and 1710 in order to divide the crown of Charles V..... After she has fought since Marignano to d'Almanza to destroy this colossus, now she should be prepared to see it reestablished under her very eyes? No, no, gentlemen, this would be to commit high treason against her interests! ('Very good! Very good!')

She has the right to oppose this first of all in the name of the independence of the German states, then in the name of her own independence, and finally in the name of the European balance of power which is the interest of all, the interest of universal society.....What is this European balance of power? It is the independence of Europe! ('Very good! Very good!')

The European balance of power in modern times is the constant care of all the nations to watch each other, to be on the lookout, to prevent one of them from assuming proportions which would be alarming for the others, and to unite in order

to resist such a powerful one in the interest of a certain balance of power. Hence came the word equilibrium.

Well, in the name of this equilibrium you have the right to oppose every policy which at the cost of all would alter the relative proportion of the existing powers of Europe.¹

The voice of history rang through these words and the great historian revealed the very soul of French diplomacy. But two months after he had made these solemn statements Prussia won an overwhelming victory over Austria at the battle of Sadowa, which was soon followed by the foundation of the North German Confederation, exactly as Thiers had predicted. These Prussian successes were considered by France as so many provocations which endangered the very foundation of French policy and challenged her proud position in the society of European nations. She readily took up the challenge and girded herself for a great duel with Prussia which was to decide whether the fundamental principles on which the international system of Europe was based should continue or whether a new turn should be given to European history. In the great historic combat which followed in 1870/1 France was unexpectedly defeated, so thoroughly and in such a short time that the whole world was amazed.

The successes of Prussia and the German Confederation under her leadership were due to profound changes in the Prussian military system, organization, tactics, and strategic principles which had been carried out long before the wars of German unification revealed their importance and epoch-making significance. All these innovations in the Prussian army were based on the principle of the nation in arms. This principle together with the idea of modern nationalism originated in France in 1793 when the National Convention decreed the levee en masse; that is, the employment of every able-bodied man in the defense of the national soil against

¹Annales du Senat et du Corps Legislatif (Paris, 1861-1870), V, 76-79.

the invasion of the enemy. Indirectly even the women were to do their part in securing the newly won freedom of the French nation. Thus the entire national body was to turn into a fighting organism; the whole nation was to be in arms.

This new principle was adopted by Prussia during the Wars of Liberation 1813-1815 with great success. Unlike in France, however, in Prussia this new military organization was carried out not only during the armed struggle for national independence but was also maintained in peace time. Prussia introduced universal military service and gradually reduced the time necessary for the training of the annual contingent of recruits to two years, after which they were sent home and formed the reserve and the Landwehr, to be called out only in case of war. In 1861/2 this system was reformed by an increase of the period of service to three years, which made a more thorough training of the soldiers possible. Greater numbers were also secured by an increase of the annual contingent from 40,000 to 63,000 men. More young blood now filled the rank and file, and the longer and more thorough training, together with new equipment, made this fighting organization an irresistible force.

Owing to this unique system based on the principle of the nation in arms, Prussia could put into the field hundreds of thousands of excellent soldiers trained not only in the best methods of tactics but also in a sturdy martial attitude and deeply imbued with the spirit of German nationalism. In the event of war nation and army in Prussia became a unit, fighting as one single organism, as a huge machine of war.

The other European great powers failed to grasp the significance of the revolutionary events of 1793 and 1813. After the overthrow of Napoleon they maintained the old system of

long-service professional armies, in which the soldiers had to serve a minimum of from eight to twelve years and, if willing, were readily kept for another term. This system created armies which were a thing apart from the nation itself. The great masses of the population did not receive any military training. The martial spirit which, owing to the system of nation in arms, was well diffused in Prussia, was entirely lacking among them. In consequence, when such professional long-service armies were destroyed by some disaster, the nation lay defenseless at the mercy of the invader.

The strategic inventions of Moltke, the chief of the Prussian general staff, were calculated to produce exactly such results. With the intuition of genius he appreciated that the invention of the railroad and the telegraph must necessarily revolutionize military tactics and strategy. In his time strategic thought was still based on Napoleonic principles. These demanded the employment of huge masses of men and artillery on the battle field, with which the enemy's lines could be broken. In Napoleon's day means of communication were primitive. If one's own lines were spread out, the enemy, with a sudden mass attack, could shatter them and break the whole army into fragments. Hence the necessity for the general to hold his troops closely in hand in massed formations. Campaigns and battles were fought on these Napoleonic ideas up to 1859. In the Sixties Moltke came to the conclusion that the new means of communication made these methods obsolete. He argued that with the railroad and telegraph it should be possible to conduct campaigns with troops spread out widely on the battle field. They could be directed by the telegraph from a central point, and with the help of the railroad, they could carry out rapid movements by which the enemy might be

completely surrounded and annihilated. If the enemy should try to break through his widely-scattered lines, the telegraph would in due time call the neighboring troops to the scene of action and in the meantime the rapid-firing long-range artillery and rifle might hold the enemy at bay. The more the enemy relied on the old Napoleonic ideas of mass and shock, the more surely he would fall within the double envelopment and deadly embracement of Moltke's rapidly moving armies. Rapidity of movement was therefore one of the principal factors in this new strategy. It could bring immense advantages, and in order to secure them right at the outset, mobilization of the Prussian armies was carried out with a swiftness and precision which amazed the military world. The enemy was still massed in his areas of concentration when Moltke's armies began their enveloping movements by rapid marches, converging on the field of battle. Hence the famous slogan of Moltke: getrennt marschieren, vereint schlagen, march separately but strike jointly.²

With these new methods Moltke could win battles which either completely destroyed the morale of the enemy, as at Sadowa, or compelled him to surrender unconditionally, as at Metz and Sedan. The effects of these amazing successes were thoroughly revolutionary. After 1871 all the great military powers of Europe hastened to copy the Prussian system. But Sadowa and Sedan have become landmarks not only in strategic methods and armaments; with them a new era began also in the development of the European

²Moltke's militärische Werke, edited by the German general staff, 9 vols. (Berlin, 1892-1900); General H. Bonnal, Sadowa (Paris, 1901), English translation (London, 1907) and La manoeuvre de Saint Privat (Paris, 1903); General von Caemmerer, Die Entwicklung der strategischen Wissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert (Berlin, 1904), English translation (London, 1905); F. E. Cochenhausen, Von Scharnhorst zu Schlieffen 1806-1906 (Berlin, 1933).

balance of power. Moltke's victories destroyed all those conditions which in the brilliant words of Thiers had been the foundations of the international system of Europe for centuries. However, they were not destroyed forever. They are living forces which have always existed, and thus soon after 1871 a new historic process was well on its way working for the restoration of the old equilibrium. This was a great danger for Germany, of which her responsible military and political leaders were fully aware. At the discussion of the organic military law in 1874 Moltke exhorted the Reichstag to vote the bill with the solemn warning that

A great historical event like the reestablishment of the German Empire hardly takes place in a short period of time. What we, with arms in our hands, have won in half a year, we must for half a century guard with arms, that it should not be wrested from our hands. About this, gentlemen, we must not deceive ourselves; we have, since our³ fortunate wars, everywhere won respect, but nowhere love.

When the emperor William I showed great reluctance in following Bismarck's advice to conclude an alliance with Austria-Hungary in 1879, the chancellor wrote to his sovereign:

Your Majesty should graciously remember that within the last five years I have repeatedly made clear in reports and letters the dangers by which Germany can be threatened by coalitions of other powers. The wars Your Majesty has been compelled to wage since 1864 produced in more than one country the inclination to take revenge in alliance with other powers. These inclinations could serve as a crystallizing point for coalitions of the same kind as those which in the Seven Years' War opposed the expanding power of Prussia.⁴

With statesmanlike moderation coupled with a masterful diplomacy Bismarck was able to forestall for a long time the danger of such a "Seven Years' War coalition." He succeeded in

³Stenografische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Deutschen Reichstages (Berlin, 1871-1914) (henceforth quoted as "S. B."), XXXI, 79-81.

⁴Bismarck to Emperor William I, Gastein, August 31, 1879; Die grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914, edited by J. Lepsius, A. Mendelssohn Bartholdy and F. Thimme, 40 vols. (Berlin, 1922-1927) (cited hereafter as "G. P."), III, 26.

building a new diplomatic edifice on the ruins of the old balance of power, but this new international structure was insecure since it rested on no time-honored and historically justified foundations. The principal factor in Bismarck's diplomacy was the German nation in arms, which in his time held the prestige of uncontested superiority in Europe.

If I can take any credit for my foreign policy [declared Bismarck], then it is the prevention of an overwhelming coalition against Germany since the year 1871. However, my whole political art would have failed in this endeavor without the German military organization, without the Marshal [Moltke], without the respect which we command and without the unwillingness to pick a quarrel with our well schooled, intelligent, and well led bayonets.⁵

How long could Germany retain this superiority in armaments? The strong forces of the European balance of power rebounded from the solid rock of the German nation in arms, since the other great powers could for a while put nothing equal into the field. But it was only a question of time until Germany should find herself among rivals possessing armies trained in the same methods and imbued with the same spirit as the German nation in arms. France especially proceeded with relentless determination to reorganize her army so that with its help the old equilibrium should be restored. The preamble of the French organic military law of 1872, after reviewing the war of 1870/1, declared:

These are the lessons of the past. The task of the future is much greater and more burdensome. It is much to be regretted that the civilized peoples of Europe have to carry this enormous burden [of the nation in arms] but they will have to carry it as long as an effective equilibrium has not been established, since among civilized peoples the periods of domination are necessarily short. But as long as an industrious and disciplined power is on our frontiers which is able to throw numerous armies on our borders, we cannot hesitate; therefore, let us briskly set ourselves to the task.⁶

⁵From Bismarck's speech in the Reichstag on June 14, 1882. S. B., 1882/3, I, 426.

⁶Journal Officiel de la Republique Française, April 6, 1872, p.2383.

During the discussion of the law the popular military writer and commander of Paris during the siege of 1870/1, General Trochu, pointed out that the essential condition of the system of the nation in arms lies in the systematic education of the entire nation in a martial spirit, and that the main purpose of the training of the annual contingent of recruits should be to impart this warlike spirit in the successive generations of soldiers. Gradually this spirit would be diffused throughout the nation. Only then could France successfully rival Germany on the field of battle. He estimated that a minimum of fifteen years would have to elapse before the mentality of the entire nation would be sufficiently transformed.

His predictions came true, because exactly fifteen years after the first contingent of recruits received its training in the new warlike mentality, the new martial spirit manifested itself in France in 1886 in the form of the Boulangist agitation. The crisis created by this warlike attitude of France was increased by the acute tension between Russia and Austria-Hungary caused by the Bulgarian problem. The feverish state of the public mind in France and Russia created an atmosphere in which the idea of a Franco-Russian alliance for the reestablishment of the old equilibrium found ready ears.

Bismarck always dreaded such a contingency. Now the danger of a coalition, the form in which, as Thiers had described, the balance of power worked, was a stark reality. It had to come sooner or later, almost with the certainty of a natural law. In 1887 it arrived and asserted itself with such a tenacity and determination that the grave tension which it produced in international relations and armaments lasted intermittently until 1893, when the last German military law was passed. By that time the

tendency to establish a new equilibrium crystallized in the Franco-Russian alliance. Under the pressure of this long crisis German military policy was forcibly placed before momentous decisions.

To counteract this pressure, early in 1887 a military law increased the German peace establishment by 40,000 men. But to Bismarck this did not appear enough. In February 1888 another law extended the age limit to those liable for military service in war from thirty-two to forty-five. Henceforth, in case general mobilization should be desired, thirteen more yearly classes of ex-service men would have to join the colors. This law with one stroke added three-quarters of a million men to the German army. These German efforts, however, were soon trumped by the French military law of 1889 which abolished every exemption from military service and provided for the incorporation of the whole yearly contingent of able-bodied young men. Two years later the Franco-Russian military convention created a ring around Germany which threatened her with an overwhelming superiority of numbers. The situation was aggravated by the fact that Germany's only reliable ally, Austria-Hungary, neglected to develop her military resources in the same rapidly increasing ratio as France, Germany, and Russia.⁷ In the face of such a disparity of military power between the two groups, something extraordinary had to be done in order to redress the balance. As regards material forces, Germany could never successfully compete with the combination of French financial strength and the countless millions of Russia's population. It was clear that some other direction of military policy

⁷Austria-Hungary's negligence caused grave concern for Bismarck. Cf. H. O. Meissner, Denkwürdigkeiten des General-Feldmarschalls Grafen von Waldersee, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1922) (henceforth quoted as "Denkwürdigkeiten"), I, 341, and G. P., IV, 283-285 and VI, 17.

had to be chosen.

As long as Bismarck was in power, the strongest ally of Germany in case of war against a hostile coalition would have been the spiritual force of the revolutionary principle of nationalism. This would have meant the mobilization of all the volcanic energies which slumber in normal times but can be awakened to a furious storm in a unified and martial nation, when an overwhelming enemy force invades the fatherland. But these spiritual forces increase the morale of the nation in arms only in a defensive war, because only the defense of home and of the national soil can call forth the utmost exertions and the noblest spirit of sacrifice from everyone. Bismarck was fully aware of the enormous potential strength of the forces of nationalism in a defensive war, and when in his great speech on February 6, 1888, he called upon the Reichstag to vote the military bill, he proudly announced his full confidence in the indefatigable spirit of the German nation in arms when forced to defend the fatherland.

Germany has no aggressive intentions. Aggressiveness on our part would create a favorable situation for the opponent, because the next war will involve tremendous masses and, in order to make these masses conscious of their duty, the cause for which this war will have to be fought must be a defensive one. Then the popular forces will be on our side. This great advantage we cannot give to the enemy. That does not mean, however, that we shall beg for the graces of our neighbors.....We Germans fear God, but no one else in the world.⁸

This was a truly statesmanlike policy worthy of Bismarck. But the most influential man after him in Germany, the assistant chief of staff, General Waldersee, had no use for such a policy. He was the confidant of the young heir presumptive who in 1888 became William II. With an inborn capacity for intrigue he quickly secured powerful influence for himself, especially in

⁸S. B., CII, 733.

military affairs. Just when the most momentous decisions had to be made in military policy, his influence became doubly important. In contrast to Bismarck's peaceful policy and defensive attitude in the question of how to conduct the inevitable war, Waldersee was a determined advocate of the idea of a preventive war to be waged in a ruthlessly offensive spirit. In these ideas of the assistant chief of staff we might see a deeper significance. The chancellor sought added strength for the German armies in the deepening and intensifying of the moral forces of the nation in arms. Waldersee and those for whose symbol he might be taken reacted to the pressure of the international crisis by deepening and intensifying the quality and the striking power of the army. In quality Germany was still holding the leading position. Her advantage in this respect could be increased by exploiting the possibilities which superior organization, speed, and offensive spirit offered. Waldersee, therefore, proceeded on these lines.

At the height of the crisis, in 1887, he changed the plans of concentration prepared by Moltke for the emergency, when Germany should be forced to wage war simultaneously against France and Russia. Moltke intended to employ half of the German forces defensively against France and the other half in a cautious and methodical offensive against Russia west of the river Vistula. Waldersee thought that better results could be obtained by massing the bulk of the German army on the western frontier and falling upon France right at the beginning of the campaign. As to Russia, he argued that at the beginning of the campaign, owing to her slow mobilization, no serious danger would threaten from this side. Before the Russian masses were concentrated a small German army, basing its operations on the Masurian Lakes region in East Prussia, could do great damage to the enemy by a series of rapid blows

delivered against his rear. On both theaters of war, therefore, superior speed and a ruthless offensive were contemplated, and the same policy was urged also upon Austria-Hungary.⁹

Bismarck, however, brought Waldersee's ambitious designs to nought by threatening to resign if the agitation for a preventive war against Russia did not cease.¹⁰ Thus Waldersee was unable to carry out his new methods and in 1888 he returned to Moltke's half-and-half arrangement and defensive strategy in the west. But he did not give up his strategic plans definitively. On the contrary, he now proceeded to prepare them by reforming the peace organization of the army.

Upon his advice the emperor in 1889 appointed his friend General von Verdy to the ministry of war. Verdy came with a great military reform program. He advocated the enrollment of practically the whole annual contingent, maintaining at the same time the three years' service. This measure was to raise the German peace establishment to a figure which would have greatly facilitated mobilization, since it would have reduced the time necessary for the transition from peace effectives to war footing.¹¹ Such a reform would have been the proper technical preparation for

⁹H. Mohs, General-Feldmarschall Graf A. von Waldersee in seinem militärischen Wirken, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1929), I, 245, 273, 277, 284, and 289, and Denkwürdigkeiten, I, 410-412. For his agitation for a preventive war cf. ibid., I, 339 and 420-423. He urged the beginning of hostilities in the winter of 1887/8 when the frozen rivers and marshes of the roadless border region of Russian Poland would facilitate the rapid movements of the small German eastern army. It is evident that here we have the germs of the idea of the winter battle of the Mazurian Lakes in February, 1915.

¹⁰G. P., VI, 24-30, 56-63, and 365; Denkwürdigkeiten, I, 340/1 and 348.

¹¹Verdy to Bismarck, Berlin, August 31, 1889; Reichsarchiv, Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918; Kriegsrüstung und Kriegswirtschaft; Anlagen zum ersten Band (Berlin, 1930) (henceforth quoted as "Anlagen"), pp. 33-35.

Waldersee's new strategic ideas. But again everything came to grief owing to Bismarck's resistance.¹²

After the fall of Bismarck, Verdy and Waldersee, who in 1890 became chief of staff, took up their plans again. In order to prepare the legislature, Verdy explained his ideas to the military commission of the Reichstag in May, 1890. But the revelation of these plans created such an antagonism in the Reichstag against their author that he had to resign.¹³ Less than two years later Waldersee also lost his influential position. But the spirit with which these two men tried to fill German military institutions did not depart with them. Their plans were taken up by the new chancellor, General von Caprivi, himself and submitted to the Reichstag again at the end of 1892, although in a very reduced form. Nevertheless, the bill was rejected, but new elections brought a favorable majority which finally accepted the great reform early in 1893. It raised the peace establishment to 557,000 men, but reduced the time of service to two years. Now the annual contingent in Germany was as high as in France, that is, 230,000 men. In preparing this law and pleading for its passage in the Reichstag, Caprivi made statements in which he laid the principal emphasis upon rapid mobilization which would carry the war into enemy territory right at the outset. He argued repeatedly that this policy was necessary because of the enormous increases of the armed forces of Germany's two neighbors, France and Russia, between whom, he was certain, a military agreement of some sort existed. He made the most remarkable statement in the Reichstag by saying that

¹²Bismarck to Verdy, Friedrichsruh, September 6, 1889; *ibid.*, pp. 36-37. Bismarck declared that "such extraordinary demands could be justified only in case of extreme danger of war."

¹³S. B., CXXI, 594.

in Germany there will be unquestionably much enthusiasm in case she should be attacked. When there is so much enthusiasm, guerilla warfare brings great results, as the Spanish example shows. But Germany in the east is flat, therefore not suitable for such kind of warfare. Germany must fight with well organized armies, and since Russia has made excellent preparations on her frontier not much time must be lost. Very quick victories are the more necessary as, since 1866, Germans are used to them and are badly spoiled by them. We need quick successes, also, because we are not so rich as the French and not so primitive as the Russians. All these political and financial results can be attained only by a vigorous offensive, and so the government cannot wait any longer with the present state of affairs existing in our military organization.¹⁴

With these public declarations and elaborate memorandums the German chancellor raised the ideas of Waldersee and Verdy to a governmental principle, upon which the future military policy of the empire was to be based. This was the final outcome of the long crisis in military legislation which lasted from 1887 to 1893. With this military law Germany definitely gave up the idea of competing with her rivals in numbers. Its preamble expressly declared that Germany had lost her former advantage in this respect. France alone overtook Germany in the race of numbers, for "the complete exploitation of the military power of the French nation had become a fact since 1889." The war effectives of France were estimated at four millions, those of Russia at four and a half millions--that is, the same as those of Germany and about twice as large as those of Austria-Hungary. Despite this numerical inferiority, Germany definitely discontinued further increases of her armed forces, so that disregarding the creation of some technical units, the law of 1893 may be considered as the final word in German land armaments up to the great war scare of 1912/3.¹⁵ France and Russia, however, continued along the path

¹⁴Ibid., CXXXI, 987-989. For similar views cf. *ibid.*, CXXIX, 2134-2139 and CXXVII, 7-21; Anlagen, pp. 46-50 and 51-56.

¹⁵Austria-Hungary in this period equally did nothing to increase her armaments.

of numerical development. Russia had no difficulties in this respect, owing to the rapid increase of her immense population. France, on the other hand, gradually began to exploit the large human reservoir of her colonies. Nevertheless German military policy held fast to the qualitative principle.¹⁶

The consequence of this attitude of the military authorities as regards numbers was that in January 1913 the younger Moltke, the chief of the general staff, and the chief of the mobilization section, General Ludendorff, drew up a memorandum for the information of Chancellor Bethman Hollweg, in which they stated that in case of war France could put 124 more battalions into the field than Germany, not counting the Belgian and British forces which would certainly have to be dealt with, since the march through Belgian territory was "inevitably necessary." Russia would have 347 more battalions and eighty-two more batteries than the Central Powers, including Rumania.¹⁷ Indeed, Germany's final reply to the Franco-Russian alliance was not numbers! The new military policy and strategic idea which originated as a result of the pressure of the balance of power upon Germany

¹⁶To a certain degree strict adherence to quality was a necessity, owing to the new naval expansion program inaugurated by Emperor William II in the Nineties. This sapped Germany's financial strength to a considerable degree, but it would be an exaggeration to say that the military authorities made a virtue out of necessity by announcing the policy of "small but good" in land armaments. The correspondence between the chiefs of staff and ministers of war in this period furnish ample proof that even without the building of the navy the qualitative principle would have been maintained. See Anlagen, pp. 57-158. In 1899 the minister of war, General von Gossler, proposed the reduction of the organized war effectives by one-third, because, he argued, the previous military legislation had created such masses that the qualitative excellence of the army was jeopardized. Ibid., pp. 57-59.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 158-173. An eminently impartial observer has declared: "The idea that Germany was overwhelmingly superior in numbers in her invasion of Belgium and France in 1914 is a myth." S. B. Fay, The Origins of the World War, 2 vols. (New York, 1928), I, 350.

since 1887 was not yet fully developed in 1893, but the stage had already been set for the emergence of it. Waldersee had established its underlying principles and Caprivi had adopted it as an essential governmental policy. Only the right man was needed to finish the process.

This man was General von Schlieffen, chief of staff of the German army from 1892 to 1905. During the thirteen years of his office he gave definite form to the new strategic thought of Germany and called it the idea of Cannae. He chose this name from the memorable battle in which the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, completely annihilated a numerically much superior Roman army in 216 B. C. at Cannae, in Southern Italy. Schlieffen elaborated this idea through profound studies in which he thoroughly analyzed the campaigns of Frederick and Great, Napoleon, and the elder Moltke, always from the point of view of the Cannae principle.¹⁸ At the same time he steadily perfected the mobilization technique and fighting power of the army, begun by Waldersee, Verdy, and Caprivi. The new direction of military policy originated by these men in the crisis of 1887-1893 and the Cannae idea elaborated by Schlieffen, then, merged into a system which was put into final form in the great "Schlieffen Plan."

The Schlieffen plan in its main outlines is well known to every student of the World War. Its basic elements were a super-rapid mobilization and concentration and an immediate vigorous offensive movement on a gigantic scale, directed against the rear of the enemy to achieve a Cannae. To ensure rapidity,

¹⁸A. von Schlieffen, *Cannae*, edited by Freytag Loringhoven (Berlin, 1925), English translation (Kansas City, Missouri, 1928); General von Groener, *Das Testament des Grafen Schlieffen*, 2d. ed. (Berlin, 1929); H. Rochs, *Schlieffen* (Berlin, 1926); Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, vol. I, *Die Grenzschlachten im Westen*; and H. von Kuhl, *Der Generalstab in Vorbereitung und Ausführung des Weltkrieges* (Berlin, 1920).

all the technical improvements which had taken place since Moltke's time were put at the disposal of the new strategic idea. In this respect the significance of the Schlieffen plan could be compared to the famous instructions of Moltke, issued in 1868 to the commanders of corps and divisions, that is, an adaptation of strategic principles to the latest technical means and to the latest results of modern military organization. Moltke could combine the advantages of the railway and the telegraph with the principle of the nation in arms, and build his strategy on them. Schlieffen could combine all these elements in a much more advanced form. In short, Schlieffen's work was the last word in the development of the principle of the nation in arms raised to the highest possible efficiency. The Cannae idea gave a deep scientific content to this new military policy. It unified its various elements into a system by subordinating them to a higher principle, that of combating overwhelming numerical superiority with high quality. Thus Schlieffen brought to final fruition a process which started in the crisis of 1887-1893. Schlieffen improved its elements, combined them, and then built on them as on a foundation a superb structure, composed of parts taken from Hannibal, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, and Moltke. Schlieffen's system with the Cannae idea was, therefore, Germany's final answer to the European balance of power. It was devised to save Germany from the deadly pressure of a huge coalition brought together by this eternally working historic force. Since the time when the Prusso-German nation in arms broke the European equilibrium to pieces in the two wars of German unification, a long struggle began between one of the oldest traditions of diplomacy and a revolutionary innovation in armaments. This struggle between the European balance of power and German nation in arms, as

we have observed, grew steadily in its intensity and proportions in the period 1871-1914. The climax in this mighty historic contest arrived amid dramatic circumstances with the outbreak of the World War.

On July 29, 1914, the Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sazonov, after having expressed his thanks to the French government for the declaration of the French ambassador in St. Petersburg that Russia could fully count on the support of her ally, ended his dispatch, sent simultaneously to Paris and London, in the following manner:

It would be very desirable that England, too, without losing any time, should join France and Russia, because for England it will be possible only in this manner to prevent a dangerous shifting of the European balance of power.¹⁹

But England was not willing to enter the struggle rashly. Therefore, on July 31, 1914, Poincare, the president of the French Republic, wrote an autograph letter to King George of England appealing for the intervention of his country. The letter ended thus: "I beg that Your Majesty will excuse this step which is only inspired by the hope of seeing the European balance of power definitely reestablished."²⁰

Finally, in accordance with her century-old traditions, Great Britain joined the coalition against Germany and her allies and the great struggle for the restoration of the old equilibrium began. At the same time the first German troops, put on a war footing by the super-rapid mobilization of the new military system, also began, by the storming of Liege, to blaze their way through the fortresses of Belgium and France for the realization of the

¹⁹Baron G. von Romberg, Die Fälschungen des russischen Orangebuches (Berlin-Leipzig, 1922), p. 30.

²⁰Collected Diplomatic Documents Relating to the Outbreak of the European War (London, 1915), p. 543.

Cannae idea. A few weeks later the battle of Tannenberg was fought, in which the neo-Hannibalic military philosophy was fully vindicated. In the west the Cannae idea could not be realized, but its basic principle of initial success, rapidity and offensive velocity was justified in so far as the war was carried deep into enemy territory. Without these initial successes Germany and her allies could not have withstood the onslaught of the rest of the world for more than four years. This reveals the true historic importance of the Schlieffen system and the Cannae idea.²¹

²¹For this reason Schlieffen's memory is held in the highest esteem in the German Reichswehr, and the Cannae idea is still a strong living force among German military traditions. Cf. "Schlieffen Tag" in H. von Seeckt, Gedanken eines Soldaten (Berlin, 1928), pp. 15-17; F. E. Cochenhausen, Von Scharnhorst zu Schlieffen 1806-1906 (Berlin, 1933). Throughout his war memoirs Ludendorff tries to prove that the Cannae idea was carried out wherever that was possible, Meine Kriegserinnerungen 1914-1918 (Berlin, 1919), English translation (London, 1919). There is another reason why Schlieffen's memory is the object of such high veneration in the German army. In the actual campaign of August-September, 1914, his plan was not carried out by his successor, the younger Moltke, according to the true spirit of the Cannae idea. Schlieffen intended to crush his adversaries with a tremendously strong right wing. Here he accumulated his mass of manoeuvre at the cost of the left wing. He hoped that the French, in order to liberate Alsace-Lorraine, would start a vigorous offensive which would carry them far into Schlieffen's trap. There was therefore no reason to oppose them with a strong left wing; on the contrary, weak German forces in Alsace-Lorraine would only draw the French still deeper into the Cannae sack where Schlieffen would hopelessly surround them with his irresistible right wing. The French actually carried out this very manoeuvre in the war, so that Schlieffen's admirers argue that his plan would have become a complete success. He divined the enemy's intentions as Napoleon before Austerlitz, but his weak successor was unable to grasp the essential points of the Cannae idea and hence the failure of the great German drive at the beginning of the World War. The younger Moltke reduced the right wing and strengthened the left wing. Thus he "unhinged" the great wheel and violated the very spirit of the plan which seems to have been embodied in the legend, according to which Schlieffen's dying words were: "Macht mir nur den rechten Flügel stark" - only make my right wing strong. For a comparison of the original Schlieffen plan with the actual events at the beginning of the war cf. Rochs, Schlieffen, frontispiece, and the works of Gröner and the Reichsarchiv, quoted in footnote No. 18.

If only its military aspects are brought into relief, the Schlieffen system offers some attractive features. But on examining it only from the political point of view we get a very different impression. For one-sided concentration and offensive foudroyante, the two bases of this military policy, had fatal consequences for Germany. In this connection the Schlieffen plan meant that Austria-Hungary had to be sacrificed temporarily for the sake of the Cannae idea. Since out of her twenty-five army corps Germany decided to send only four against Russia, her ally had to face the immense armed hosts of the Tsar single handed. Schlieffen argued that, in case his giant Cannae should succeed in France, not only the campaign in the west would be decided, but also the struggle against Russia. Thus the fate of Austria-Hungary was to be settled somewhere around Paris. This was the attitude of the general staff. But the directors of Germany's diplomatic policies had exactly the opposite attitude. They maintained that, since Germany had to face a great coalition, her only reliable ally, Austria-Hungary, should receive all the diplomatic support Germany could give her. These views were laid down by Bülow when in 1908, after the meeting at Reval between King Edward VII of England and the Russian Tsar, it was accepted that Germany would have to confront England as well as France and Russia in the coming war.²² During the following Bosnian annexation crisis these ideas were consistently upheld by Bülow as a fundamental thesis of German foreign policy²³ and then indorsed by Emperor William II in the famous "Shining Armor" speech. The Kaiser acted in a similar fashion after the Balkan Wars when he

²²Bülow to the Prussian minister in Munich, Berlin, June 25, 1908; G. P., XXV/II, 475-479.

²³G. P., XXVI/I, 56-57, 103.

paid one of his periodical visits to Francis Joseph in Vienna. On this occasion he assured Berchtold, the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, that "whatever should come from the Vienna foreign office would be a command for me."²⁴

William II did not have to wait for long. Within less than a year Austria-Hungary asked for full support in carrying out a policy which evidently would involve Germany in a general European war. And the Kaiser took the command. On July 6, 1914 Count Szogyenyi, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador in Berlin, reported to Berchtold:

With regard to our relations to Serbia, the German government is of the opinion that it is for us to judge what is to be done to clear up the situation [caused by the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand]; whatever we may decide upon, we can always be sure that we shall find Germany at our side, as the ally and friend of the Monarchy.....In the course of further conversation I learned that the chancellor, like his imperial master, considers immediate action on our part against Serbia as the best solution of our difficulties in the Balkans. From the point of view of international politics, he considers the present moment more favorable than some later time.....²⁵

In contrast to this attitude of the directors of Germany's foreign policy, Schlieffen reduced all intercourse with his Austro-Hungarian colleague to the exchange of New Year's congratulatory telegrams, since he considered the Austro-Hungarian army a quantite negligeable.²⁶ There could be no greater self-condemnation of Germany than this glaring divergence between her diplomatic and military policies. In consequence, Austria-Hungary with full

²⁴Report of Berchtold to the foreign office October 28, 1913; Oesterreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik von der Bosnischen Krise 1908 bis zum Kriegeausbruch 1914, edited by L. Bittner and H. Uebersberger, 9 vols. (Vienna, 1930), VII, 512-515.

²⁵Oesterreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik, VIII, 319-320. Cf. also The Outbreak of the World War, German documents collected by K. Kaitsky (New York, 1924), pp. 79 and 90.

²⁶Rochs, Schlieffen, pp. 53, 54, and 56.

German support precipitated a conflagration in the east, but Germany would not participate in it. When the Kaiser on August 1, 1914, expressed his wish to the younger Moltke that the German army should be concentrated in the east, the answer was that this could not be done since there were no plans for an eastern concentration.²⁷ Germany, on account of a local quarrel between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, had to declare war on France and violate Belgian neutrality. Herein lies the tragedy of the Schlieffen system.

The trend of German military policy and strategic thought which resulted in the Schlieffen system was a historic process. It was delayed by the genius and prestige of Bismarck, who saw a greater guarantee for Germany's security in the principle of nationalism. In the system of nation in arms he did not seek for a panacea for every ill consequence entailed by Germany's geographical position and the European balance of power. He realized that the nation in arms was only a by-product of the higher historic forces of nationalism and that a military system based on the nation in arms could be really strong only if the nation was strong. The Schlieffen plan did not reckon with these organic connections, because it sought strength elsewhere. But in this quest for superior quality the only possible source for real strength, the nation and its historic mission, were disregarded. Instead of subordinating strategic thought and military policy to these higher considerations, the opposite direction was chosen; strategic theory became the highest aim and national policy was subordinated to it. In consequence, Germany had to enter the war

²⁷This is dramatically related by the younger Moltke himself in his Erinnerungen, Briefe, Documente 1877-1916, edited by E. von Moltke (Stuttgart, 1922). For the circumstances of the definite rejection of the plans of concentration of the German army in the east cf. Der Weltkrieg, I, 17-18.

in 1914 under conditions which completely discredited her historic mission. It was her and Europe's tragedy, that at the great parting of the ways before which the great struggle between the balance of power and nation in arms put Germany in the great crisis of 1887-1893, a historic process began which ended in a military instead of a political Schlieffen plan.

